United Nations A/59/167

General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 July 2004

Original: English

Fifty-ninth session
Item 87 of the provisional agenda*
Sustainable development

Activities undertaken during the International Year of Freshwater, 2003, and further efforts to achieve the sustainable development of water resources

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/252, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-ninth session a report on the activities undertaken during the International Year of Freshwater, 2003. In its resolution 55/196, the Assembly proclaimed 2003 the International Year of Freshwater; encouraged Member States, the United Nations system and all other actors to take advantage of the Year to increase awareness of the importance of freshwater; and called upon Member States, national and international organizations, major groups and the private sector to make voluntary contributions in accordance with the guidelines for international years and anniversaries. In its resolution 56/192, the Assembly welcomed the activities undertaken by States, the Secretariat, organizations of the United Nations system that are engaged in inter-agency work related to freshwater and major groups for the observance of the Year. The present report takes stock of the activities undertaken during the Year at all levels. It also reports on partnerships and alliances created for the Year's activities and examines the potential for planned activities beyond 2003. Public outreach initiatives have been at the core of the Year's activities, and the report provides a detailed overview of public awareness efforts at all levels. The legacy of the Year beyond 2003 is evident from the declaration by the General Assembly of 2005-2015 as the International Decade of Action, "Water for Life". Other future activities dedicated to the sustainable use and management of freshwater are outlined in the report.

* A/59/150.

04-43735 (E) 130804

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I. Introduction and background

1. In its resolution 55/196 of 20 December 2000, the General Assembly proclaimed 2003 the International Year of Freshwater. In that resolution the Assembly encouraged Member States, the United Nations system and all other actors to take advantage of the Year to increase awareness of the importance of freshwater and called upon Member States, national and international organizations, major groups and the private sector to make voluntary contributions in accordance with the guidelines for international years and anniversaries. In its resolution 56/192 of 21 December 2001, the Assembly welcomed the activities undertaken by States, the Secretariat, organizations of the United Nations system engaged in inter-agency work related to freshwater and major groups in observance of the Year. The Assembly also requested, in resolution 57/252 of 20 December 2002, that the Secretary-General submit to it at its fifty-ninth session a report on the activities undertaken during the Year. The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

2. Awareness of the relationship between freshwater use and sustainable development has increased dramatically in recent years. This can be partly attributed to a number of ongoing national and international initiatives and activities, including the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Millennium Declaration focused attention on such issues by establishing internationally agreed development goals pledging to halve the number of people unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water by 2015 and to stop the unsustainable exploitation of water resources. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation resulting from the World Summit reaffirmed and further elaborated these goals, setting the target of establishing national water-resource management strategies by 2005 and pledging to halve the proportion of people without basic sanitation by 2015.

3. The International Year of Freshwater, 2003, provided an opportunity to follow up on the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals and to consolidate and build upon the many previous efforts to protect, use and manage freshwater resources in a sustainable manner. The real challenge today is to focus attention on action-oriented activities and policies that facilitate the long-term protection of freshwater and increase sanitation coverage. In order to develop freshwater as a sustainable resource, collective efforts to build and strengthen capacity will have to extend far beyond 2003. The Year contributed to raising awareness of the importance of water to life and to culture, and to getting people directly involved in spreading the messages about conserving and valuing this precious resource. The awareness-raising had an impact; by the end of the Year, the General Assembly had proclaimed the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", 2005-2015.

4. All activities undertaken during the International Year of Freshwater, 2003, including the production of public information and educational materials, were funded through the donations of interested Governments or major stakeholders. Donations for the International Year were generously provided by the Governments of Japan, the Netherlands, Singapore, Switzerland, Tajikistan and others, as well as by non-governmental organizations and private sector partners. Valuable support was provided by the United Nations Department of Public Information for the production of information and press materials, the dissemination of information

about the Year throughout the world and the organization of briefings and events. The United Nations agencies concerned with water resources, coordinated through UN-Water, undertook particular efforts to celebrate the Year and in their budgets and programmes put a special focus on its observance.

5. The International Year attracted widespread interest and inspired a range of actions around the world on water and sanitation issues. From the official launch of the International Year on 12 December 2002 until beyond the end of 2003, it captured the imagination of international agencies and development banks, national focal points, Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, water managers and experts, entertainers, authors, painters and private citizens from many countries.

II. Institutional arrangements and inter-agency coordination

6. The International Year of Freshwater, 2003, provided an opportunity to further develop existing networks and coordination both among the United Nations agencies and bodies in UN-Water and between the United Nations system and all other relevant stakeholders. The Year also provided a platform for promoting ongoing water-related initiatives and coordinated the efforts of United Nations agencies to promote integrated water-resource management.

7. In its resolution 55/196, the Assembly invited the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (now UN-Water) to serve as the coordinating entity for the Year. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) agreed to jointly coordinate United Nations-system activities for the Year.

8. The Year was launched on 12 December 2002 in two parallel events, at United Nations Headquarters in New York and at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. In New York, an all-day event was organized for Governments, NGOs and the private sector, generously financed by the Singapore Public Utilities Board and a private firm. At UNESCO, the Director-General convened a similar event to mark the beginning of the International Year.

9. Other actions supported by United Nations agencies and launched during the Year were the following:

(a) UNESCO and the World Water Council, supported by the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the Universities Partnership for Transboundary Waters, established a new Water Cooperation Facility to address issues related to international watercourses, means of equitable river-basin sharing and conflict resolution;

(b) The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council launched the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All in Schools campaign in a number of countries;

(c) The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched its Community Water Initiative ($50 million for 2003-2008) and its Gender and Water Resource Guide (with the Gender and Water Alliance);

(d) UNDP and the Global Water Partnership and others launched a programme on effective water governance;

(e) The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to create the Water for Asian Cities programme ($10 million in grants from ADB and UN-Habitat for the first two phases and $500 million in ADB loans for water and sanitation projects in cities across Asia over the next five years);

(f) During the eleventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, in New York from 28 April to 9 May 2003, several special events were held, including the opening of the Water Drop multimedia exhibit, a half-day meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development focusing on the Year and a briefing on the *World Water Development Report*. The Commission selected water, sanitation and human settlements as the main themes for its first two-year cycle (twelfth and thirteenth sessions, 2004-2005);

(g) The United Nations Postal Administration launched a special series of stamps commemorating the International Year of Freshwater, issued in New York, Geneva and Vienna;

(h) The Secretary-General issued statements stressing the importance of freshwater on the international agenda on the occasions of the World Day for Water, World Environment Day, the Dushanbe Freshwater Forum and World Habitat Day. He also wrote the foreword to the *World Water Development Report*;

(i) Many special issues of magazines and journals published by bodies of the United Nations were dedicated to the Year.

10. The United Nations system agencies have worked closely together throughout the Year in a number of global activities focusing on water resources, including the celebrations of World Day for Water, World Environment Day and World Habitat Day. United Nations agencies also created an Inter-Agency Gender and Water Task Force, whose members include focal points for gender and for water from 15 United Nations agencies and 4 non-United Nations entities. The Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was nominated as task manager. The Task Force aims to have significant input into the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 2004 and 2005, the work of the Task Force on Water and Sanitation of the Millennium Project and especially the programmes of the "Water for Life" Decade.

11. The collaborative work that has been carried out during the Year with partners from the United Nations system, Governments, non-governmental organizations, institutions and the private sector has been extremely valuable in the lead-up to the twelfth and thirteenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development and will be carried on through the "Water for Life" Decade. The activities initiated jointly by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNESCO have laid a solid foundation for expanded work in the future.

12. The closing ceremonies for the International Year of Freshwater took place at UNESCO headquarters on 20 January 2004 in the presence of the Director-General, the representative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and special guests, at the end of a two-week exhibition, in the UNESCO Hall, of the Water Drop multimedia exhibit.

III. Other international activities

13. The Year was also marked by a number of other major water-related conferences in many different countries, including the following:

(a) The Third World Water Forum, hosted by the Japanese Government, under the auspices of the World Water Council, was held in Kyoto, Osaka and Shiga from 16 to 23 March 2003. The International Year of Freshwater guided the focus of the conference and led to specific commitments by international organizations, Governments and major stakeholders on activities that would move beyond "business as usual";

(b) The International Forum on Freshwater, from 29 to 31 August 2003, was hosted by the Government of Tajikistan and sponsored by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNDP, the Aga Khan Foundation and the Swiss Development Agency. The Dushanbe Water Appeal called for an International Decade for Action: "Water for Life", 2005-2015, which was proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 58/217 of 23 December 2003;

(c) The International Conference Water for the Poorest: Responding to the Millennium Development Goals was held in Stavanger, Norway, on 4 and 5 November 2003, under the aegis of the International Water Academy in cooperation with a community of Norwegian non-governmental organizations;

(d) The Pan-African Implementation and Partnership Conference on Water was held in Addis Ababa from 8 to 12 December 2003 under the auspices of the African Ministerial Council on Water, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa;

(e) The international symposium Basis of Civilization: Water Sciences was held in Rome from 3 to 6 December 2003, organized by the Italian National Committee for the International Association of Hydrological Sciences and the Italian National Committee for the UNESCO International Hydrological Programme.

14. Other important international conferences held during the International Year included those that took place in Moscow, Kyiv, Madrid, Boston, Los Angeles and Minneapolis (United States of America), Lisbon, Paris, Rome, and Geneva. These either were organized in observance of the International Year of Freshwater or dedicated a majority of programme elements, panels and side events to the Year's agenda.

IV. National activities

15. As Governments play the most important role in the creation and implementation of water policies and agreements made at the global and national level, special attention was paid to what was happening in countries and the work being done by national focal points. There were over 70 country-nominated focal points — 36 from International Hydrological Programme committees worldwide — and most countries around the world organized events for the Year. The national focal points represented 25 countries in Europe, 14 in the Americas and the Caribbean, 12 each in Africa and Asia, 3 in Central Asia and 5 in the Middle East.

16. In most countries, the national focal points appointed for the Year have provided support for activities at the national level and have been able to authorize the use of the official WaterYear2003 logo for non-commercial purposes. In many countries, events have been organized at the municipal, provincial and national levels, in many cases supported by United Nations information centres.

17. The Intergovernmental Council of the International Hydrological Programme and its committees, in particular, were very active in organizing both scientific and technical events and awareness-building events. The video *Water: The Drop of Life*, produced for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, has been shown at many special national or local events, as well as being broadcast on TV in many countries.

18. Within the official web site of the International Year of Fresh Water, 2003 (www.wateryear2003.org), a series of pages were created for each country, allowing the national focal points to promote, in their native languages, the celebrations at the national level and to publicize activities being organized in the country. These national pages included a national events calendar linked to the international events calendar; an education corner to highlight educational material dealing specifically with water in that country; and a page with information about the water situation in the country, with links for obtaining more information. A number of countries ran imaginative public awareness campaigns by producing advertising for use in movie theatres, on national television or on public transport.

V. Public outreach and education

19. The most important accomplishments of the International Year of Freshwater, 2003, were in the areas of public information and educational projects, geared towards all ages, all countries and all professions. The Year's official web site was based at UNESCO and was an important tool for making information accessible on events happening worldwide through an up-to-date calendar, as well as providing educational material for people of various age levels and cultural backgrounds. Links to national web sites, United Nations background documents on water issues and concrete information on how to get involved were also featured. Through the web site's extensive educational material, facts and figures, activities and newsletter, as well as the partnerships and work at the local, national and international levels, the number-one message conveyed was that awareness-raising was crucial for bringing water education into the community.

20. The multimedia travelling exhibit for the International Year (Water Drop) was financed by the Government of the Netherlands and was launched by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the Water Dome in Johannesburg during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, as a preview for the Year. This excellent, informative exhibit then travelled to the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto and on to New York during the eleventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in the spring of 2003. It subsequently made stops in Madrid and Geneva before going to UNESCO in Paris in January 2004.

21. A major contribution of the United Nations agencies during the Year was the first edition of the *World Water Development Report: Water for People, Water for Life*, launched on World Day for Water at the Third World Water Forum in Japan. Partly because the launch coincided with the Forum, the report received high-level

media attention. The *World Water Development Report* covers the full spectrum of water-related issues, from life and well-being issues (health, ecosystems, cities, food, industry, energy) to management challenges (managing risks, sharing water, valuing water, ensuring the knowledge base, governance). The report places the emphasis firmly on people and Governments as both the cause of and the solution to today's water problems. The executive summary of the report was released in nine language versions (Arabic, Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish).

22. The newsletter *Splash!* was transmitted electronically and featured best practices, upcoming water events and conferences and news stories from around the world. It introduced new educational material on water management and conservation issues and proved to be an effective way to get people actively involved during the Year. The newsletter was published every three weeks in three official United Nations languages (English, French and Spanish).

23. A press section was maintained to support the work of interested media and journalists. The educational web site of the United Nations Department of Public Information (www.cyberschoolbus.un.org) provided a range of interactive learning tools for children to gain knowledge about water and sanitation issues. The work of the United Nations in promoting the Year focused strongly on providing tools for groups to use in order to take action in their communities and for individuals to become aware of the issues.

24. At the beginning of December 2003, the United Nations University, in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and with financing from the United Nations Development Account, announced the launch of an online diploma course aimed at training water-management experts. The 10-subject, 250-hour course will be aimed mainly at current government officials and engineers and will be initially based at three regional centres, in West Africa, the South Pacific and Asia. The programme, to be offered free of charge, will award graduates a diploma bearing the United Nations seal. The curriculum was developed by more than 60 academics and professionals around the world.

25. System-wide United Nations efforts have been supported by United Nations information centres around the world. The information centres helped coordinate and initiate events and conferences at the national and local levels. They also bore the full costs of producing and translating information materials. Information centres in Italy, Japan, Portugal and Spain demonstrated a particularly high commitment to the International Year of Freshwater, 2003. Some countries, including Pakistan and Tajikistan, produced special publications on their water resources for the Year.

26. The Department of Public Information and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs jointly organized a public-information day on 16 October 2003 in observance of the International Year of Freshwater. As part of the weekly Department of Public Information NGO briefings, a panel discussion was held, entitled "Water for life: stewardship and sustainability", followed by musical performances and two afternoon meetings on the topic "Fresh perspectives on the world's water crisis". These discussions involved various speakers from the United Nations, national delegations, NGO representatives and ecological activists. The level of attendance and interest shown by NGOs was high.

27. The organizing team for the Year coordinated, both from New York (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) and Paris (UNESCO), a general WaterYear2003 e-mail-account, responding to thousands of queries and proposals in more than six languages. Questions and enquiries came daily from students working on school assignments on water, Ph.D. candidates, university professors, local newspapers, scientific journals, schoolteachers, public and private water utilities, development consultants, city council members and environmental groups.

28. The large number of enquiries from teachers and professionals demonstrated an exceptionally high demand for educational material on freshwater issues, which eventually led to the publication, by the Department of Public Information, of the cross-cultural United Nations classroom resource guide on water, *Every Body Counts, Every Drop Matters*. The hardcover book is commercially available through the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Bookstore.

VI. Partnerships

29. The Year provided an excellent opportunity for United Nations agencies to work with NGOs, the private sector and other members of civil society. The success of the Year was due principally to the involvement of these partnerships in projects, events and joint activities throughout 2003. NGOs and civil society provided content for the web site and the electronic newsletter and were the heart and energy of the Year's events. The focal points for the Year, based at United Nations agencies and at the national level, worked hard to encourage NGOs to work together locally and nationally and to connect projects with civil society groups and vice versa. With approximately 30 e-mail messages a day coming in from NGO groups around the world, the Year was able to feature much of the work that these groups do.

30. Since activities for the Year were self-funding, in accordance with the policy for international years, partnerships were essential. They played an important role in developing and contributing to the success of the International Year of Freshwater, 2003. The partnerships created over the course of the year made various contributions, particularly in publicity, financing and project development.

31. Local, national and international NGOs played a very active role in the promotion of the Year around the world. For example, the United Kingdom-based WaterAid joined forces with other organizations to participate in the celebrations of the Year in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom regional initiative, aimed at raising awareness of freshwater issues, included competitions in photography, essays and art. The Earth Day Network initiated a two-year campaign (2003-2004) highlighting critical water access, health and usage issues. Its interactive web site featured a compilation of literature for educators and students on how to evaluate the quality of community water resources and made suggestions for action. The web site also gave examples of communities around the world confronting water problems, including the stories of 10 thirsty children from around the world. It posted an invitation to corporations asking them to join in the effort to conserve water by participating in the Earth Day Corporate Water Challenge. Rotary International took an active role in the Year. One of its main projects was to provide emergency water storage solutions for the people of Papua New Guinea, where freshwater access is limited.

32. Youth represent the world's future water users, managers, professionals and leaders. They are, thus, the key to a future where people are aware of water issues and capable of solving problems related to overconsumption, exploitation of resources and pollution. Thus, it was crucial to involve youth actively in the Year: youth focal points were established in many countries, and several youth groups and NGOs came on board to celebrate the Year. The focal points were sent resource information each month and were invited to contribute to the electronic newsletter and the web site.

33. The private sector participated, both financially and otherwise, in various projects throughout the Year. In several cases, private enterprises were willing to donate products to regions in need of water-resource solutions. Many artists showed great interest in the Year, by donating paintings and other works and by using their talents to promote awareness. For example, some of the photos on the International Year of Freshwater web site were provided free of charge by Panos Pictures, a photo agency based in London that represents photojournalists around the globe.

34. Many private sector companies eagerly volunteered to assist in disseminating the Year's messages. An example of this is the use of the WaterYear2003 logo on the publicity posters for a children's film, *Les enfants de la pluie*, aimed at conveying the importance of sustainable solutions for water resources. The film company also contributed educational materials based on the theme of the film to promote the Year.

VII. Some lessons learned

35. **The coordinating agencies were fortunate to have existing United Nations system-wide programmes working in the area of water resources (UN-Water and its World Water Assessment Programme) that participated in the activities of the Year. This facilitated communication and information-sharing among the agencies and provided concrete information for the web site and agency activities, as well as for enquiries from and communication with the public, NGOs and the private sector.**

36. **The public is very interested in knowing what the United Nations agencies do. It is important that information be presented in a way that can be understood and used by the public. The joint web site, run by various United Nations agencies, helped to make the system's activities and projects accessible to the public.**

37. **United Nations agency and national focal points are also needed to make such a campaign viable. These focal points should have contacts with the major stakeholders interested in the issue, such as youth, women and businesses. It would be useful to have a list of major group contact points in each country available on the web site. These groups should be provided with educational materials, the logo, a web space, etc.**

38. **Materials that are appropriate and usable for youth groups should be created, including stickers, posters and other resources, as well as ideas for projects. Often such groups were interested in receiving a guide on how to get involved, what kind of projects to do, how to find funding, etc. Youth provide a good avenue for disseminating the messages.**

39. **It would have been useful to have guidelines for national focal points on how to approach the private sector for funding and partnerships. These guidelines could be available on the web site as well. It would also have been useful to have a person whose function was to work with the private sector and negotiate and secure partnerships to provide microcredit, scholarships, grants, etc., to groups around the world doing work at the local and national levels. This possibility could be explored for the "Water for Life" Decade.**

40. **The electronic newsletter *Splash!* was an important tool for keeping people informed in multiple languages and also for directing people to the web site. If significant work and time are being put into developing a web site as a tool for groups, then the same also needs to be done to ensure that this tool remains useful by being kept up to date.**

VIII. Beyond 2003

41. Water continues to be a central issue in the international community, and, in the coming years this centrality will be supported by a number of pivotal international events. The Commission on Sustainable Development, in its current cycle of review and policy years (twelfth and thirteenth sessions, 2004-2005), is reviewing the thematic cluster of water, sanitation and human settlements.

42. On World Day for Water (22 March) in 2004, the Secretary-General announced the establishment of a high-level Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, which aims to galvanize global action on these issues as part of the international effort to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs will serve as secretariat to the Board. Former Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto of Japan has agreed to serve as Chairman of the Board, which includes a wide range of eminent persons, technical experts and other individuals with proven experience in inspiring people, moving the machinery of government and working with the media, the private sector and civil society. The Board is expected to use the unique expertise of its members to raise awareness of water and sanitation issues, to help mobilize funds for water and sanitation projects and to encourage new partnerships.

43. On World Day for Water 2005, the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", will be launched, to run from 2005 to 2015. The timetable for the Decade coincides with the timing to reach the Millennium Development Goals and the commitments of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation on water and sanitation, providing an excellent rationale to concentrate on water and sanitation issues. The "Water for Life" Decade provides an additional opportunity to get more people more involved and to plan real, long-term projects to help involve all sectors of society more actively in the sustainable use and management of freshwater resources. A programme of work for the "Water for Life" Decade, with a strong focus on implementation, is currently under consideration by UN-Water. The lessons learned, partnerships formed and information collected during the International Year will be invaluable for commencing the "Water for Life" Decade.